

Questions arise about status of dogs at the town kennel

By Caitlyn Kelleher
JOURNAL STAFF REPORTER

As one of his first acts as the interim town administrator, Paul Bouchell, had to take steps to quell a rumor posted on the Internet.

Town hall employees returned to work on the morning of Oct. 20, to more than 30 messages on the voicemail system for the town administrator's office — the most the system will hold — after a report that said two dogs would be killed if new homes were not found.

"I think this is an example of the Internet gone bad," Bouchell said.

Officials received between 200 and 400 phone calls from across the country asking the town to stop a reported killing of two dogs housed at the town pound.

Bouchell posted the following statement on the town's Web site: "Contrary to a recent rumor, the town of Ashburnham, nor any agent or staff member, has, or will, euthanize any dogs under the care of our animal control officer."

Of the four dogs, a home has been found for one on October 19 and we are confident that homes will be found for the remaining dogs."

Police Chief Loring Barrett reiterated the statement on Tuesday, Oct. 24.

"We have yet to euthanize one, nor are there any scheduled to be euthanized," he said.

Bouchell said that a woman — whose identity was not released — approached Town Administrator Kevin Paicos

and told him that the dogs had been in the kennel for too long and were suffering from that situation. He said the woman and Paicos decided to give animal control officials one and two weeks respectively to find homes for each of the two dogs housed at the shelter.

But, Paicos extended that time indefinitely a day after issuing the timeline, after speaking with animal caregivers at Ahimsa Animal Shelter in Winchendon and other animal trainers.

Paicos, who is on National Guard duty, was unavailable for comment.

Barrett did say that he and Animal Control Officer Maggie Bennett are working finding the dogs homes or other shelters where they will get more exposure so they can be adopted out.

One of the three dogs at the kennel has already been placed in a new home. The remaining dogs are a pit bull who has there for 10 months and another dog who has been there for three months.

"I try to keep them until that I can find them a home," Bennett said.

One of the dogs was owner surrendered and the other dogs were strays.

Bennett said the town works with Ahimsa to provide medical treatment to the animals and to help with adoption.

"We work very closely with other animal control departments" Barrett said.

He said he was not bothered by the concerns that people

express concerns because it causes discussions on the issue. He said that after talking with officials at the MSPCA over the last week, it has been determined that the dogs are in a fine condition for the short-term.

"We want to try to get these animals moved to a shelter or adopted," he said. "It's a dog pound, at this point in time it is not designed for long-term. ... We're looking at making some improvements up there."

Town officials have been working to develop changes to the animal control services over the course of the last few months and are planning to present budgetary changes at the annual town meeting in 2007.

The end goal is to move the operating budget of the animal control department under the police chief's jurisdiction as well as the supervision of the animal control officer and the rest of the department.

The board of selectmen and the town administrator will retain the oversight of animal violation and complaint hearings, Barrett said.

He said the new rules are still under development.

"The department has been underfunded and understaffed," he said. "You have a part-time person doing a full-time person's job."

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Briggs Building Committee holds first meeting to launch project

By Caitlyn Kelleher
JOURNAL STAFF REPORTER

The Briggs Building Committee met for the first time on Oct. 18 for a brief lesson about the process on which they were about to embark.

The committee, comprised of 20 members, met with Ashburnham-Westminster Regional Superintendent of School Michael Zapantis and School Committee Chairman David Christianson. The 20 members represent six voting blocks, who will get a chance to voice their opinions and ideas of the project.

"There is no place here for personal agendas," Christianson told the committee. "Hopefully, we will build the right building at the right price and at the right time."

The goal of the committee is to have a project ready to propose as soon as funding becomes available from the state, which will be no earlier than July 2007.

"What we are trying to do here today is build a home for the kids," Christianson said.

The committee didn't take any action during that first meeting in the Briggs library but they got a brief lesson on the School Building Authority — which reimburses school districts for part of the costs of construction. They also got an update on the preliminary building com-


mittee information and the upcoming process.

The building, which was toured by state officials last school year, rated a four on the scoring method meaning it is the most in need of repair or rebuilding. The sixty-two schools in the state ranked a four.

The committee will be meeting on Wednesday, Nov. 15 to review a pending preliminary environmental study of the property.

The results of this study will help the committee decide if they can do more work on their current property, including renovating the land the town sits on, or if a new location should be considered.

Zapantis expected the results back before that November meeting.



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